Old age came gradually to Lady Russell, and no specific year marks its onset. One may select 1702 as the beginning of her seniority; it was the year in which she turned sixty-five, King William III died, and Anne, Queen Mary’s sister, succeeded to the throne. For the next several years Rachel suffered little diminution in vigor, keeping in close touch with her children and grandchildren, following public affairs, monitoring her business interests, devoting herself to piety, visiting and receiving friends. She did not show strong signs of declining powers until the end of 1711, the year in which her friend Rutland and her son and second daughter died, her children within six months of each other. Living thereafter mostly at Stratton, Rachel became even more introspective and reflective than before, and occupied herself in writing meditations and short essays. Age and imperfect eyesight did not dampen her enthusiasm for “scribbling.” Her cousin, the earl of Galway, became her closest confidant, but in contrast to earlier periods in her life, she seemed to have more friends among women. During these years she achieved a serenity of spirit that testified to her success in reconciling herself to sorrow and in accepting God’s providence. She virtually disappeared from the written record after 1718 and died at Southampton House five years later, in 1723, at the age of eighty-six.

Lady Russell’s longevity requires comment. To live to age eighty-six is an achievement in any society, the more so in Stuart England, when life expectancy at birth, across the population, was thirty-two years. That rate, however, jumped significantly for individuals who were members of the rural elite and survived to age twenty-one; their average age at death was early sixties, except during the late seventeenth century. The age at death of many of Rachel’s family and friends conforms to this statistic and makes her long life seem remarkable rather than extraordinary. Several people in her blood and extended family lived beyond sixty—her paternal grandmother to eighty-one; de Ruvigny, her uncle, to eighty-six; Galway, her cousin, to seventy-two; Devonshire
to age sixty-eight; Rutland to seventy-three; and Bedford to eighty-seven. Some of her friends also lived to advanced age. For example, Fitzwilliam lived to sixty-one years of age, Lady Shaftesbury to sixty-six, and Lady Essex to eighty-one. If one looks more widely, one finds that of the 267 men listed in *Who's Who in History, 1603–1714*, 63 percent attained the age of sixty or over. The group in which Lady Russell was probably an outstanding exception is women, and in particular noble women, but there are no studies to confirm that hypothesis.

Lady Russell’s longevity may owe something to biological tendency among both her French and English ancestors. But even more important surely were the moderate level of her fertility, which shielded her from yearly pregnancies, and her obvious ability to withstand miscarriages and the experience of at least five childbirths. Still further, her recovery from measles and smallpox during her twenties provided immunity which protected her from those dread diseases. Moreover, her wealth and intelligence served her health. She herself noted that she was prompt to seek the best medical advice when illness struck members of her family or herself. In her view medicines should be prepared only by skilled hands. She admitted that she had been “timorous” in face of the plague in 1665 and had left London. Furthermore, Rachel’s longevity may have been promoted by her love of walking and her active, vigorous personality, which induced her to stay busy long after she had reached advanced years. She alluded to the need to stay occupied in one way or another in 1698, remarking that “so one is doing ’tis well enough.” Her attitude towards aging may also have encouraged long life. She does not seem to have thought of herself as “old” until she was nearly seventy. The first time she alluded to her old age was in 1706. Writing to her son she confessed, “I feel the decays that attend old age creep so fast on me, that, although I may yet get over some more years, however, I ought to make it my frequent meditation, that the day [of death] is near.” In fact, she continued to enjoy good health, suffering from only minor infirmities, such as shortness of breath in 1709, “a sort of rash” in 1714, and, in view of her dislike for cold weather, undoubtedly the common cold. In about 1717, when she was eighty, she complained to her granddaughter of cold weather, writing in words that show that she had not lost her command of felicitous expression: “Cold winds make your old mama shrink.” In the same year, she commented upon her “easy health,” saying that she was as free from infirmities as anyone her age could hope to be and possessed of enough memory to enjoy hearing stories of her family. But the last few years brought significant changes—a tremor in her handwriting and then an absence of letters and memorabilia, testifying to further dimming of her sight and slowing of her mental faculties.
From 1702 to about 1707 Lady Russell maintained interest in and exercised modest influence on public affairs. Although the death of King William and the accession of Anne to the throne find no comment in Rachel’s surviving correspondence, one may be sure that she regretted the passing of a monarch who had consistently favored her petitions and advanced the interests of members of her family. As a Whig matriarch Lady Russell approved the terms of the Act of Settlement and expressed impatience with anyone who did not drink to the late king, the princess of Hanover, and the queen.9 If she was not on such friendly terms with the new queen as she had been with Queen Mary, still she had known Anne for years, and the relationship was apparently cordial. Although Anne preferred Tories to Whigs in the early months of her reign, she detested factionalism and was prepared to honor worthy Whigs.10

Within six days of the change of monarchs, Anne showed Rachel the high regard in which she held Lady Russell’s family by implementing the arrangements left by King William to create the young duke of Bedford a Knight of the Garter.11 Rachel must have taken huge satisfaction in knowing that the initiative she had undertaken two years before was finally realized. Equal pleasure would have been hers when her son served as lord high constable of England in the coronation ceremonies on April 23, 1702, and was named a privy councillor.12

Emboldened perhaps by these marks of favor, Lady Russell lost no time in apprising the new monarch of another piece of leftover personal business, that of a dukedom for Rutland. On March 29 her daughter Katherine wrote regretfully to Rutland that everything “we knew to be so near a conclusion” was now stopped because of the king’s death. Asking him to keep the letter private, she inquired if he would approve of her mother’s plan to tell the queen that the king had promised the honor and beg her to make it good.13 A fortnight later, on April 14, Rachel informed Rutland that she had taken the matter out of her daughter’s hands “to save her trouble.” Apparently Lady Russell had already approached the queen, for she reported that Anne was firmly determined not to promote anyone so as to avoid anger and disappointment among those not honored. Expressing confidence that Rutland would be among the first promotions when they came, Rachel assured her friend that she would continue to promote his interests. If she failed, it would not be “from negligence,” for she had followed the best advice she could think of getting.14 But the first honor Anne conferred, on December 2, 1702, went to the earl of Marlborough, who was raised to a duke.15 Later in the month, Lady Russell had an audience with the queen but, showing her good judgment and restraint, refrained from reopening the matter of Rutland’s promotion. Reassuringly, she explained to Rutland that Marlborough’s elevation was designed to assist him in his dealings
with foreign states. Within three months Rachel had won Anne over, and in March 1703 Rutland was created duke of Rutland and marquess of Granby. Thereafter, his son bore the title of Lord Granby and Katherine became Lady Granby. Deserving Rutland was, but he owed his new title in large measure to the efforts of Lady Russell.

Rutland’s dukedom is the only example of her influence on a major appointment at the national level during Queen Anne’s reign. There are hints, however, that Rachel still retained a reputation as a person of influence. In 1711 Lady Cowper (whose son Rachel had assisted in 1689) apparently asked her to facilitate a meeting between Lord Cowper and Rachel’s son-in-law, the duke of Devonshire, which Lady Russell did. In 1712 she assisted the dowager duchess of Bedford (her daughter-in-law) in getting a place for a man at East India House. But, clearly, her role had declined from what it had been between 1689 and 1702. The ebb and flow of parties during the reign of Anne, the death of Devonshire in 1707, which removed the most powerful contact that she had at court, and perhaps her advancing years account for the fading of her role.

Her influence on appointments to local church offices, however, continued. She did not hesitate to address the first earl Cowper, who was in her debt for her promotion of his appointment as king’s counsel in 1689. Accordingly, in April 1706 she appealed to him to favor a Mr. Bolton for a small living in Bedfordshire, declaring that his doing so would be a great obligation on “our family, particularly” herself. In February 1715 she again wrote Cowper respecting a dispute over a parish in Leicestershire and pressed for the appointment of her candidate.

In the meantime Lady Russell sought to persuade Rutland to accept the post of lord lieutenant of Leicestershire, a position he had held during the Restoration. Disarming him by saying that if what she wrote was displeasing it was because of her “zeal,” Rachel declared in a letter of 1702 that his refusal was a secret and “kept very faithfully, yet I have got it.” Protesting that she would not attempt to try to change his mind, she proceeded to do just that. “Upon my knowledge,” she wrote, the queen had received solicitations for the post, but had chosen Rutland. If he declined, the opportunity would go out of his family, whereas if he accepted, it could be “lasting for generations.” Rachel dismissed the reason for his pique (apparently he did not like it that the queen had named gentlemen on the commission without consulting him), saying that “you great men should bear with things you disapprove for the public good.” She wanted him to permit her to discuss the matter with Devonshire, but promised that she would not approach Devonshire unless Rutland empowered her to do so. Rutland rejected her importunities, but declared that he regarded her as a “faithful friend.”
response Rachel, true to her nature, expressed enthusiastic pleasure at his remark, averring that she would “make it my business all my life upon all occasions to show I am so indeed.” But she did not like to lose the argument with him and iterated and reiterated her disappointment at his decision. Rutland finally accepted the post in 1706, and at his death in 1711, it passed to Rachel’s son-in-law. One cannot read the letters about this appointment without sensing how much Rachel fulfilled her own, perhaps subconscious, ambitions through the men in her family.

Lady Russell exploited her connection with Rutland in an effort to help Lord Hartington, her son-in-law, in his campaign in July 1702 for a parliamentary seat in Yorkshire. She took it upon herself to engage Rutland to support Hartington. Writing on the ninth of July, at a time when earlier she would have been in deep distress remembering the trial of Lord Russell, she apologized for Hartington’s negligence in approaching Rutland himself and asked Rutland to forgive him. She stated that Kate had told her that Rutland had said Hartington could have his support for the asking. Writing in tones appropriate to a male head of family, she declared, “I dare answer for him that he will be careful never to forfeit that honor of friendship.” Rutland did as she requested, and perhaps because of his influence, Hartington was elected.

Advancing years and retreating influence did not diminish Rachel’s deep interest in public affairs. “Sources” close to the center of events, newspaper accounts, and her own position served to keep her well informed. She relayed news of domestic and foreign affairs to Rutland and to Lady Granby, her most faithful correspondent during these years. For example, she followed the deterioration in the queen’s health, reporting in November 1702 that Anne could not set foot on the ground and had had a special chair made to convey her into her coach; Lady Russell declared in 1703 that the queen, despite her infirmity, was determined to be present in the House of Lords. Her notices of other national affairs were often elliptical; she referred to angry speeches against the queen in the House of Commons, predicted that the union with Scotland would be difficult to negotiate, and mentioned that in 1707 the House of Lords had not returned thanks for the queen’s speech. One looks in vain for mention of the fate of the bill against occasional conformity, an issue in which her interest may be presumed. High Tories introduced the bill to prevent Dissenters from attending Anglican services on the odd occasion only to qualify for office. It must have grieved her that her son voted for it in the House of Lords.

The War of the Spanish Succession, diplomatic negotiations, and the progress of the Peninsula Campaign seem to have held special fascination for Lady Russell. For example, in 1703 she provided Katherine
with a lucid account of a discussion in council respecting whether Spain
should declare war against Portugal immediately, and whether to lay
waste the land. In July 1707, when she was seventy years old, she
wrote with what may be called a youthful intensity that “every post day”
filled her with “an inexpressible curiosity,” and that the consequences of
a battle were so great that her “heart pound[ed] on the post comes.” “I
keep the post bag in my pocket,” she said.

Lady Russell directed a large portion of her still considerable
energies towards keeping in touch with her three children and their
growing families, who now lived apart from her. Until 1712 her resi­
dences were Southampton House and Stratton House, whereas her elder
daughter, although often in London, lived at Chatsworth in Derbyshire,
hers second daughter resided either at Belvoir Castle in Leicestershire or
Haddon Hall in Derbyshire, and her son, after about 1703, lived at
Woburn or at Streatham Hall with Mrs. Howland. (Photographs of
Chatsworth, Belvoir Castle, and Woburn Abbey are reproduced in the
illustrations.) In various ways she tied her children to her—in­viting
Wriothesley and his wife to live with her in Southampton House for the
first few years of their married life, lending Southampton House to her
elder daughter and her family, encouraging their visits, being present at
the births of her grandchildren, and, above all, writing by almost every
post to one or the other of them. “I wrote last post to your brother, not
to you. Now it is to you, and not to him,” she explained to Katherine.

She was too intelligent not to be sensitive to the fact that her advice might
be resented. Indeed, she was not above employing a stratagem to per­
suade her son and his wife not to visit Streatham, where she had heard
that smallpox had been prevalent. Instead of writing him directly, she
urged her daughter Rachel, whom she knew intended to visit her son, to
open the matter with him. “Any caution from me,” she explained, “may
not take.” And to Katherine she disarmingly confessed that much of
her advice “might be omitted, if I did not like so well to be scribbling
when I am doing it.”

Diverse reasons explain why Rachel tried to bond her adult chil­
dren to her. Those reasons further illuminate her personality. Her anx­
ious surveillance of their affairs as adults simply continued her anxious
care of their affairs as children. Her love for them as the offspring of her
dear husband combined with a deeper sense of the importance of family.
She took special pleasure in her grandchildren not only because they
were attractive little people, but also because they were the link to suc­
cessive generations. Moreover, in advising and importuning her chil­
dren, Rachel avoided loneliness and created the feeling that she was
being useful to people she held dear. The act of writing letters was as
important to her during her advanced years as before. Finally, maintain-
ing these ties preserved her role as matriarch of the family and her sense of importance in it.

Lady Russell dearly loved each of her children, and no estrangement between her and them ever occurred. With her eldest child, Rachel, she seems to have exchanged few letters, probably because Lady Hartington lived part of the time in London, and the letters that were written have with few exceptions failed to survive. Rachel was not always as attentive as Lady Russell would have liked, and at least once answered her “very quick,” but the relationship was apparently harmonious.32 With her youngest child, Wriothesley, Lady Russell encountered disappointment. Although the second duke of Bedford was not dissolute, he did not come up to his mother’s high standards of conduct. In 1703 she wrote of her dismay that he and her son-in-law, Lord Granby, had lost a “great deal” at Newmarket. She had hoped that he would go to the races “better resolved,” but resignedly concluded that “what must be must be.”33 Not only did Bedford gamble, but he also was rumored in 1703 to have offered to settle £600 for life on the actress Anne Oldfield.34 Rachel does not mention this gossip, but it is not unreasonable to think that it reached her ears, so well informed was she about London society.

Still further, despite his wealth Bedford found himself short of cash. He failed to pay his mother rents due her when he occupied Southampton House. And he borrowed money from her at least twice. In 1701 Rachel lent him £3,500, £1,500 of which remained unpaid at his death, and in May 1707 the hefty sum of £16,000. It was not until Bedford’s untimely death that the financial matters between him and his mother were mostly settled. The rents due on Southampton House appeared as still unpaid at her own death.35 Lady Russell does not mention these loans, but if they concealed her son’s profligacy, they must have saddened her.

A further reason for disappointment may have been that she and her son did not share the same interests. As we have seen, Bedford developed a love of music and of collecting rare books and manuscripts, tastes for which Lady Russell showed no inclination. From 1702 he employed in his household at a salary of one hundred guineas a year two musicians, Nicola Cosimi and Nicola Haym, the latter a violoncello player and composer, who promoted Italian opera in England. Bedford’s patronage was important to the development of musical tastes in England.36 Lady Russell does not refer to the musical soirees at Southampton House nor to Bedford’s underwriting performances at one of the theaters in London. At no time in her life did she seem to take pleasure in music. Bedford was also deeply interested in horticulture and in improving the landscape at Woburn, going to the trouble to import many rare plants, especially ranunculi from Crete, “never before seen in
England." Rachel left no comment on these projects either.

The fact is that Bedford’s interests did not extend to politics, the subject that absorbed Lady Russell. As we have seen, she had not made an effort in Wriothesley’s youth to inculcate the political principles that had animated her and Lord Russell, and in the absence of a father who might have guided him, Bedford cultivated interests in a different direction. Despite the high offices that he held, Bedford was perfunctory in his attention to public affairs and not very faithful in his attendance at the House of Lords and the Privy Council.

On the other hand, he took seriously his duties as patron of the borough of Tavistock. In 1702 the vicar of the church in Tavistock refused to submit to episcopal jurisdiction. Bedford, surely out of the same concern for the welfare of the Anglican church that had underlain his vote against occasional conformity, gave orders that the minister should be told that his actions were not the “way to please me.” This minor matter takes on significance because of Lady Russell’s involvement in it. The vicar remained impenitent, and later, at an unspecified date, the bishop reopened the problem, this time writing directly to Lady Russell. In response she stated that she knew about the difficulty because just after the old duke’s death his steward had come to her with a letter from the vicar. The vicar had charged then that the bishop was persecuting him and expressed alarm that the new duke would not support him as the old duke had done. Rachel recalled that her son was at Newmarket, and that, in his absence, she had replied, saying that Bedford would support him in all things that were just and reasonable. Following this exchange, Lady Russell, with her customary attention to detail, spoke to the bishop’s chancellor about the matter in hopes of resolving it amicably. Her position was that the vicar should observe the rubric and the bishop’s injunctions, but she also said that she and her family opposed punishing people for not conforming to the ritual of the Church of England. She emphatically objected to keeping up a “dissension, when the reason of it is ceased.” Not only did Lady Russell’s actions in this little incident show that she still commanded a role in the affairs of the Bedford family, but also her views testify to her continuing sympathy for Dissent at a time (about 1708) when it was falling out of favor nationally.

In 1706, when the duke was twenty-six years old, his mother sent him a lengthy letter of exhortation and admonition. Writing from Stratton in July, a time of withdrawal and contemplation, Lady Russell veiled strong sentiments in imploring and loving language. She began, “My dear child, I pray, I beseech you, I conjure you, my loved son, consider what there is of felicity in this world, that can compensate the hazard of losing an everlasting easy being; and then deliberately weigh,
whether or not the delights and gratifications of a vicious or idle course of life are such, that a wise or thoughtful man would choose or submit to.” Confirming her belief in eternal life and of the need to prepare for it while on earth, Rachel argued that there was no hardship in the virtuous life and that “when we have moderated our irregular habits and passions,” subduing them to reason and religion, life on earth is pleasant. The result is the assurance of eternal life. “Remember,” she warned, “that to forsake vice is the beginning of virtue; a virtuous man need have no fear of either this life or death.” There is no evidence of what prompted her to write in these terms, but the letter shows her deep concern for Bedford’s spiritual and moral integrity.

In 1708 a problem arose whose nature is unknown but which probably concerned money. On August 3, Bedford wrote his mother from Woburn to ask for advice “what to do in this case.” He said that he could not come to a resolution on a proposal made respecting his wife and Mrs. Howland, but that he had no intention of doing anything but what was just and good. Since the matter was urgent he was confident that he would be excused for troubling her. He ended by saying that he expected his elder sister and family to arrive from Chatsworth later in the month. Whatever its nature, this problem deeply disturbed Lady Russell, for a fortnight later in a letter to her daughter Rachel, she lamented that there was but one subject to think or speak of, “one that is not to be cast off, nor yet digested. For my part, I can bring no serious, thinking, considering thought; but, turn it all ways...it is dismal.” “I throw it away as often as I can,” she continued, “since no result is so taken from my opinion.” The inference is that Bedford rejected the advice that he had requested and thereby offended his mother. But that he should have brought the problem to Lady Russell in the first place underscores the respect in which he continued to hold her.

As Bedford approached his thirtieth year, he seems to have modified his behavior. Edward Russell, the earl of Orford, spent a week at Woburn in 1708 and reported that the duke and duchess were practicing great economy and regularity in their domestic affairs. With great pleasure, augmented perhaps by the memory of his former doubts about the integrity of his nephew, he wrote Rachel that her son was deeply involved in improving the grounds of his estate. He was “business itself,” so much so that Orford feared that he might grow covetous! Orford went so far as to advise him not to pay off his debts but to borrow more to complete the improvements that he had in mind. Rachel may not have approved of Orford’s advice, but she must have delighted in his account of life at Woburn.

Lady Russell would have taken further satisfaction in 1710 when Bedford identified himself with the Whigs and voted against Dr.
Sacheverell. And she could hardly have failed to approve her son’s contributing to the publication of Dr. Burnet’s History of My Own Times, which appeared finally in 1724–34, long after Bedford’s death. He also subscribed to John Strype’s The Life and Acts of Matthew Parker, the first Archbishop of Canterbury, published in 1711. These books were so far removed in character from those that Bedford usually purchased or promoted as to suggest that Lady Russell may have urged his sponsorship.

In the spring of 1711, ignoring earlier advice not to visit Streatham because of the prevalence of smallpox, Wriothesley and his family arrived at his mother-in-law’s estate for a visit. In May he was stricken with smallpox. Dr. Hans Sloane was brought from London to treat the duke, but to no avail. Lady Russell, because of her immunity to the disease, was the only member of his close family who could safely stay with him. Aided by two “diligent waiters,” John Hobson and Peter Bramston, and a nurse, Mary Sellwood, Lady Russell kept a vigil at his bedside. Professing devotion to God and love of his wife, children, sisters, and mother, the duke died at the age of thirty on May 26, 1711.

“Alas! my dear Lord Galway,” Rachel wrote distractedly, “my thoughts are yet all disorder, confusion, and amazement... I did not know the greatness of my love to his person, ’til I could see it no more.” But with fortitude built up over twenty-five years, Lady Russell was able to command her grief and believe that once “nature, who will be mistress, has... with time relieved herself,” God would, through His grace, help her to understand the wisdom of His providence.

She must have felt exquisite emotional pain at the death of her only son, on whom she had lavished so much care, for whose advancements she had worked so hard, and in whom she looked to find the embodiment of her husband.

Lady Russell seems to have felt special warmth for her middle child, Katherine. In all periods of her life, Rachel needed a faithful correspondent, and in this stage Kate seems to have filled that role. Rachel wrote so often to her daughter that she felt obliged to reassure her that it did not matter that she might receive two of her mother’s letters before she had answered the first. Katherine seems to have treasured her mother’s letters, for she preserved many of them, including one or two to her children.

Rachel poured out a steady stream of letters to Lady Granby containing family and public news; comments on problems with the butler, the nursery maid, the wet nurse, and the laundrymaid; advice about illnesses and medicines; and admonitions to Kate not to ride horseback unless she was sure that she was not pregnant. Rachel did not lose her ability to vivify a scene or tell a good story. For example, revealing her boundless curiosity, she reported that she had touched Lady Cartwright’s tumor, which caused the lady to jump, and had asked her many ques-
tions about it.\textsuperscript{51} Or she recounted the story about Lady Salisbury, who was “mightily frenchified in her dress.” On her way to Hatfield in a party of two coaches and six horses, Lady Salisbury met a man on the road and, lifting up the curtain of her window, spoke in French to “ask how far ’twas to Hatfield.”\textsuperscript{52}

Lady Russell took special interest in the education of her grandchildren and for several months in 1707, when she was seventy years old, made a project of finding a French tutor for the Rutland children. She consulted Lord Halifax and Lord Sunderland, among others, on the matter and arranged to interview candidates so that she might ask them all the questions on her mind. She held firm views on the differences between English and French methods of instruction, which she explained in detail to her daughter. The French, she said, teach by rote, whereas the English establish a rule, so that if a student forgets something he will know where to go to find it. The French do not know as much Latin as the English. The French are not so harsh on their pupils as the English. Students trained in the French method often face remedial work when they enter university.\textsuperscript{53} Sound advice, fussy interference, and loving concern characterize her letters to Lady Granby.

Lady Russell also corresponded with her grandchildren, and a few letters to the Rutland children survive. They show her ability at tailoring her remarks to fit the interests of a young person. To James, the eldest, she wrote a little sermon, expressing the hope that he would always “think of your old grandmama as a friend that wishes you all the good qualities [that] make one useful to his country and happy to himself and then he can’t be only wise but a good man, too, which is true wisdom.” She wished Thomas luck in answering all the hard questions put to him by his father. To Lady Frances she sent best wishes for success in the current lottery and hopes that her father’s horse should win in an upcoming race.\textsuperscript{54} She won their confidence and love, expressed later in the naming of their children after her or her family and by their asking her to stand as godmother for a great-grandchild.

In the fall of 1711 Katherine, now the duchess of Rutland following her father-in-law’s death, was five months pregnant with her ninth child, when serious complications set in. Lady Russell was with her at Belvoir and in early October wrote frantically to Dr. Sloane in London to send Dr. Chamberlain or his son to Leicestershire. Rachel feared a miscarriage, and if not that, danger to her daughter’s life. There had been no movement of the fetus for twelve days, and her daughter had suffered retching, but had eaten a boiled chicken each day to keep up her strength. A few days later, begging him to excuse her haste and illegible handwriting, Rachel again appealed to Dr. Sloane to send Chamberlain “as soon as possible. All of us here are full of fear. She is very dear to
Her anxious letters vivify the sense of helplessness that confronted women and those who loved them when something “went wrong” in pregnancy and the birth process.

What happened next is clouded, but Katherine apparently rallied, at least enough to make the journey to Southampton House, where the best medical attention was readily available. There she was delivered of a son and died on October 30, 1711. Tradition has it that Lady Russell went from Katherine’s bedside to that of her elder daughter, who was also about to give birth. Resolute in her determination not to tell the duchess of Devonshire about the duchess of Rutland’s death, Lady Russell assumed a cheerful air and answered Rachel’s inquiries about her sister by saying, “I have seen your sister out of bed today.” Her remark was, strictly speaking, true, for she had seen Katherine placed in a coffin!

Lady Russell recorded but did not comment on this terrible further blow that she had to endure in the year 1711. One hopes that she took comfort from the high praise given her daughter by William Burscough, who preached the funeral sermon, and by others who celebrated the duchess’s “sweet temper,” “virtuous education,” and “wit.”

One must assume that Rachel was prostrate for a time with grief in the winter of 1711–12. In one year she had lost her friend Rutland, her only son, and her second daughter.

After the death of her daughter, Lady Russell changed her principal place of residence. From 1712 to 1719 she lived mostly at Stratton, with only occasional visits to London, to friends living elsewhere, to her daughter-in-law at Woburn, and undoubtedly to her daughter at Chatsworth. The reason for this change was an event that illuminates still further aspects of Rachel’s character—generosity of spirit and practical business sense. Within less than a year of Katherine’s death, the duke of Rutland decided to remarry. Rachel handled what could have been a difficult situation with tact and kindness. Charlton had brought her the rumor of Rutland’s intentions and of his “anxieties” over how to tell her. Rachel first satisfied herself that he had provided well for each of his children, adding to every younger child’s portion, and then concluded that his remarriage was “the most solid instance of his respect and love” for Katherine that he could give. She decided that it would be “wrong” for her to take offense and instructed Charlton to let him know that she would willingly receive him. The interview “put us both in some disorder,” she reported, but on a friendly footing.

So friendly were they that on July 3, 1712, Lady Russell leased the “great part” of Southampton House to Rutland for seven years at a rent of £300 a year, plus taxes and the requirement to keep everything in good repair. Rachel apparently retained some rooms in Southampton House for her own use and presumably occupied them
on her trips to London. There is no indication that the lease was renewed nor that Southampton House was again let during the last years of Rachel’s life. Presumably she was in London more regularly and for longer periods of time after 1719. She was there at the time of her death.

An undated portrait painted at about this time reveals her appearance in old age (see the illustrations). It depicts a handsome woman with white hair, dressed in widow’s weeds, her face showing faint lines about the mouth and eyes. The rounded face and full upper torso suggest that Rachel had gained weight. The most striking features of the portrait are the set of the firm mouth and the confidence of the large, dark eyes. The portrait is of an intelligent woman who has achieved serenity of spirit, knowledge of self, and peace with God and the world.

This impression finds confirmation in what is known of Lady Russell in the last decade or so of her life. Her interests and activities remained much the same: public and business affairs, religious contemplation, friends and family. Naturally, her command of and concern for politics and finance declined.

Yet, Rachel did not lose touch with local affairs. She took an interest in local politics in Hampshire and almost certainly contributed money to the 1712 election in Bedfordshire. Further, in an act that showed her sense of fairness for her tenants in Hampshire and also surely her desire to protect her own interests, on January 6, 1712, she “ordered” her agent in Hampshire to hold a “court according to custom, for the manor of Micheldever.” To do this presented problems, for the records of the estate had disappeared with the disappearance of one “Mr. Pitman.” But there existed a “Survey Book, which was taken in the Year 1677,” which could serve as a basis for the proceedings. Lady Russell also ordered the agent to hold “all other courts as are needful from time to time” until she directed to the contrary. Thereafter, manorial courts, called in her name as the lady of the manor, were held each year until the end of Rachel’s life. It would be unlikely that Lady Russell ever appeared in such a court, but there is no evidence on the point. That the court was kept busy is suggested by the fact that the tenantry of the estate underwent change during the decade as people died or moved away and others took their place. Lady Russell signed a total of thirty-one leaseholds and/or copyholds during this period.

In May 1712 Lady Russell, with the help, of course, of her lawyers, took a decisive step in resolving a situation with respect to her steward that had given her “many terrible waking hours.” The sequence of events is unclear, but it is known that John Spencer, who had served Rachel as “chief” agent for “diverse years,” was suspected of having embezzled upwards of £10,000 of her money. He had been responsible for holding “very great sums of money” for her from her
rents and the profits of her securities. He also assisted her in her role as sole executrix of the first duke of Bedford’s estate and served as chief agent for the second duke. Her lawyers suspected him of having stolen the money, but did not have iron-clad proof. Their fear was that if she filed suit in the Court of Chancery, Spencer might be able to hold up a settlement for years. An unidentified “great lawyer” whom she consulted beyond the four attorneys who were advising her implored her to settle out of court. Accordingly, Lady Russell and Spencer signed an instrument dated May 30. Spencer was required to submit an inventory of his estate in land, leases, debts, and so forth and convey the whole to Lady Russell. In return Lady Russell agreed to hand back sufficient property to provide subsistence income for Spencer, his wife, and his children. Spencer won protection from any lawsuits that might arise respecting his duties as chief agent, and Lady Russell got title to any debt owed to Spencer that might surface in the future.66 The settlement of the matter was a great relief to Rachel. From then until her death, Thomas Sellwood was her devoted and admiring steward. Naturally enough, as she grew older, Rachel increasingly depended upon Sellwood to assist her in managing her affairs. In 1718 she wrote him with respect to some business matter, “I leave it to you to act as you find it proper.”67 She repaid Sellwood’s skill and loyalty by leaving him a handsome legacy at her death.

Another matter that claimed Lady Russell’s attention was the drawing up of a new will to supersede that of May 21, 1695, a step necessitated by Bedford’s death.68 Signed on March 12, 1712, the will named as executors men of her extended family, her sons-in-law William, duke of Devonshire, and John, duke of Rutland; a relative from her first marriage, Richard Vaughan; and John Charleton, an unidentified friend. It specified a number of legacies and bequests that testify to Lady Russell’s thoughtful nature and continuing commitment to Dissent. Thus, she left money to the poor in Middlesex and to the Charity School there for teaching poor children to read. The parishes of Micheldever, East Stratton, and Chenies were to receive a legacy. She remembered the “poor French Protestants in this kingdom,” her cousin Galway, her grandchildren, and relatives from her first marriage.

The heart of the document concerned her London properties. She had in 1704 transferred to Bedford the properties from which her portion was derived, reserving the income to herself for life, so they were not at issue.69 The will provided that Lady Russell’s Middlesex properties were to be placed in the hands of trustees and be used to raise money to repay the £10,000 mortgage on Southampton House due the duke of Rutland. It also ordered that at her death Southampton House, its gardens, appurtenances, and pastureland should be sold at the price of
£6,000, with right of refusal to be given to the eldest living son or other descendant of her daughter Katherine. If that person did not wish to purchase the property at that price, it was to be sold for the highest price possible and the money used to pay off debts. Her London properties then descended to the duke of Bedford, her grandson.

The residue of all the transactions mentioned in the will was to go to Rachel, duchess of Devonshire, “alone and without her husband.” The language was unequivocal. It was Lady Russell’s intention that the property “may always be and remain in her separate use and absolute power and disposition exclusive of her husband.” Rachel’s sensitivity to the restraints on a married woman’s legal rights over property and her patent determination to use the law to nullify those restraints are found further in a clause of a codicil to the will, dated May 24, 1718, whereby she gave to her “cousin Green, one of the daughters of Sir Edward Vaughan, deceased” £100 “for her sole separate and personal use.” The text declared that her husband was to be “excluded from any benefit thereof and the said sum be not subject to his debts and encumbrances.”

That Rachel’s role as matriarch of her extended family continued into her old age finds confirmation in an episode that occurred in 1713. In that year her niece Lady Elizabeth Norton (the daughter of her sister Elizabeth) and her husband, Richard Norton, Esq., separated on grounds of incompatibility of temper. Norton turned to Lady Russell to recommend the terms on which they would part. Writing in reply in strictest confidence—she said no one “upon earth knows any word of [this letter]”—Rachel asked him to “accept of my plain way of expressing my meaning” and proceeded to suggest a detailed property settlement which proved satisfactory to both parties. Norton expressed his deepest appreciation, and Lady “Betty” must have felt likewise, because she became a frequent visitor of Rachel’s. The services that Lady Russell performed for the couple required knowledge of her niece’s fortune and settlements and of Norton’s estate in terms of present and prospective value. Few women in early-eighteenth-century England would have been equipped to execute such a project. That she was able to do so testifies to her high intelligence, and that Norton sought her advice underscores her reputation for fairness and integrity.

Lady Russell became even more introspective and self-conscious in old age. In 1713 she noted that she had “looked in my other papers of each year before.” She clearly took pleasure in marking the subject matter on the outside of her essays and the name of the correspondent, the date, and the topic on the outside of letters. Undated essays, prayers, scattered reflections, notes on reading, and biographical fragments, written in a handwriting that grows increasingly tremulous, survive from these years.
Lady Russell’s self-consciousness was highly enough developed for her to undertake in two forms the beginning of an autobiography, but not so highly developed that she finished either project. Some autobiographical fragments are in the form of a diary. In these papers Rachel simply recorded the dates of her marriages, of the births and deaths of her children and her miscarriages, of the removes from one country house to another and to London, and the illnesses and deaths of members of her family. She made two attempts to set down such a skeleton outline of her life, one covering her life from about age fourteen to the marriage of her daughter Rachel in June 1688, the other starting at the same time and breaking off in 1714. In neither case did she provide comments. The second effort at autobiography took the form of an essay in which she reviewed her life up to her second marriage in terms of her own shortcomings. The paper begins, “Vanity cleaves to me, I fear, O Lord! in all I do. In all I suffer, proud, not enduring to slights or neglects, subject to envy the good parts of others, even as to worldly gifts.” As in the case of her confessions Lady Russell faulted herself for such weaknesses as pride, enjoyment of worldly pleasures when she was a young woman, sharp temper, desire for recognition, failure to train her servants properly in religion, and loving her second husband too passionately at the expense of her awareness of God. By condemning herself for these “sins” she purged her conscience. Such self-abnegation was not unusual in the diaries and private papers of seventeenth-century women.

Lady Russell’s “paraphrases,” as she described them, of books of history and religion show what a conscientious and intelligent reader she became. They shed light on Rachel’s study habits and the seriousness of her inquiries. She diligently took notes on such books as Taylor’s *Holy Living and Holy Dying* and copied out passages from an unidentified history book. Such notes also suggest the limited intellectual sophistication that she brought to the task, which, in view of her education, would be expected. She was not trained as a scholar nor as a student of religion or philosophy, and she did not possess a first-class creative intellect. Rather, she remained into old age a highly intelligent, deeply religious, and reflective woman who enjoyed reading and taking notes on what she had read. Although not unique, Rachel stands out among other educated, serious-minded aristocratic women of her age in exemplifying such characteristics.

Lady Russell’s surviving essays are short pieces on such topics as charity, friendship, duty to brethren, affliction, and marriage. Often she related the topics to her own shortcomings. These essays are her own work, the fruit of many years’ reflection. For example, in discussing the subject of “duty to brethren” she wrote that the “spiritual bond of reli-
gion should of all others the most closely unite our hearts; forgive me if my love to Christians as Christians is not such as it should [be].” Or again, with respect to friendship, she confessed that she had been negligent in admonishing those she loved, because she did not want to displease them.

The most carefully developed essay that has survived is titled “Instructions for Children.” In it Rachel set out her views on how to teach a child to know and love God. Lady Russell’s first recommendation was to lead a child to think of God as a spirit: without end, good, powerful, and merciful. Showing sound pedagogical understanding, she went on to suggest that this and other religious principles be illustrated from the Bible and given application in the child’s life “as his or her capacity will bear.” As her use of the feminine pronoun demonstrates, Rachel envisioned her recommendations as applying to both girls and boys. Revealing the impact of Calvinist-inspired Dissent on her thinking, Lady Russell stressed the corruption of human nature by sin and the need to “break children of their wills,” to make them humble and willing to accept God’s providences for themselves. But testifying to her commitment to Anglicanism, she made no reference to the idea of the Elect, and instead asserted that with God’s grace and help, man may redeem himself from sin. Drawing upon her own experience, she cautioned against loving the secular pleasures of this world, including the things of the mind. “The great propensity we have to love the world and the creatures in it hinders the advances in religion,” she asserted. Only when one loves God completely and accepts His will wholeheartedly may one find happiness on earth. Although she taught that reason was one way to know God, she insisted that one should form a child’s heart before his mind. Piety, truthfulness (for a pure mind was essential to understanding), humility, gentleness to neighbors, acceptance of God’s Providence—these were the characteristics in a child that Lady Russell commended. On them, God could build great things, she said. Man’s understanding, as Rachel herself had discovered, “is extreme[ly] curious, active, light, exorbitant, apt to judge, precipitate in judging.” “Take care [children] do not become idolaters of reason; it leads too many to atheism, but if you would have them comprehend things by reasoning, make them give a divine reason for things.” She completed her essay with a kind of catechism, posing such questions as “Why had God created the world?” and supplying appropriate answers.

What use Lady Russell envisioned for this material, beyond her own satisfaction in writing down her thoughts, is unclear. In 1712 or 1713, the earl of Galway appears to have raised the question of giving “her writings” a wider audience. She responded to the notion with an uncharacteristically self-deprecating remark, declaring that her writings
“were not worth your reading nor the postage” and that no one other than himself and her niece (Lady Norton) would find them of interest. But she admitted that she “often” felt herself “willing to relieve my thoughts so apt to reflect upon times past.” Perhaps Galway’s interest reinforced her own inclination to look over her papers in 1713 and to write down her thoughts on various subjects. The fragmentary nature of most of the material suggests that it was meant to be private, but the care with which she set out her ideas on instructing children to lead a religious life may indicate the hope that this essay would be read by others and perhaps would serve as a guide for instructing her grandchildren. She preserved even the fragments. They were in the “trunks of writings” and the “strong box” containing writings that were sent to Chatsworth after her death. Who is to say that this woman who took such pleasure in writing and in the good opinion of people she admired did not believe that her essays would find favor with them?

All during her life Rachel enjoyed friendships with both men and women. Reflecting upon friendship in old age, she declared that her “biggest blessing” was “loving and being loved by those I loved and respected.” In her declining years she appears to have been more in the company of women than men. She refers to upwards of fifteen women in her circle of correspondents and/or visitors, including Lady Essex; Sarah, duchess of Marlborough; Lady Vaughan, her sister-in-law from her first marriage; two French ladies, Madame Chavernay and Madame de Cosne, perhaps distant relatives, who paid her a visit; her niece Elizabeth Norton; and her daughter, said in 1718 to be “often” with her. She took pleasure in their company, in visiting, talking, and playing cards. She also delighted in the times when a grandchild found time to dine with her, as noted on February 13, 1718.

But, as before, her closest confidant was a man. At this time, her cousin, the earl of Galway, filled that role. Galway and Lady Russell had much in common: a family connection, personal sorrow and suffering, and commitment to public affairs and to religion. They had kept in touch with each other over the years during his absence in the wars, when he had been severely wounded, losing an arm and an eye. In 1704 he had purchased an estate, Rookley, in Hampshire, not far from Stratton, and lived there whenever he was in England. The cousins clearly admired and liked each other. Galway found in Rachel’s letters more wisdom and comfort, he declared, than contained in one of Tillotson’s sermons. For her part, Rachel must have admired him for the same reasons as did a contemporary who described Galway as “a man of honour and honesty, without pride or affectation,” one whose talents “fitted [him] for the cabinet as well as the camp.” Lady Russell wrote Galway with a freedom and confidence that testified to her fondness for him. In
August 1712 she confided that in writing him, the “amusement is more agreeable to myself, and I assure myself you will make it so to you.” Two and a half years later, she began a letter to him, “There is no post-day I do not find myself readily disposed to take my pen, and dispose of it as I now do.” The two aging cousins exchanged visits as well as letters, and in 1720 on a visit to Stratton House, Galway died. The walk along which his coffin was carried to the church is still known today as “Coffon Walk.” In testimony to the high regard and affection in which he held her, Galway left his entire estate to Rachel. With his death the circle of Rachel’s immediate family narrowed to her daughter, Rachel, and her grandchildren.

Lady Russell becomes a shadowy figure in the last five or six years of her life. The glimpses that we have of her still show four aspects of her character—love of family, rationality, interest in politics, and sharp business acumen. The last letter in her hand to have survived was written on June 17, 1718, when she was eighty-one years old. It is to acknowledge the invitation of her grandson (Katherine’s son) that she stand as godmother to her great-grandchild. No account of the baptismal ceremony follows, but one may be certain that the event brought great joy to Lady Russell. Another glimpse of Rachel comes from a story preserved by her steward, Thomas Sellwood, that she had told him herself. Lady Russell had been reading in her “closet” at Southampton House, when the candle and candlestick jumped off the table, and a hissing fire ran across the room, leaving some papers in flames. She rose and kicked the papers into the fireplace and, unperturbed and without calling for help, settled down in the dark to consider what could have caused this unusual incident. The windows and the door were locked and the only opening to the room was through the chimney. “That something should come down there, and strike my candle off the table in that strange manner, I believed impossible,” she told Sellwood. Unable to think of a rational explanation she called in her servant-in-waiting. In great embarrassment the man declared that by mistake he had given her a “mould candle with a gunpowder squib, designed for sport with other servants on a day of rejoicing.” Unfazed by the possible danger to herself, she readily accepted his apology, saying that she had no interest in the matter other than to discover the cause.

Rachel continued to take an active interest in politics and to enjoy the reputation of being a concerned and well-informed person. For example, in July 1717 John Hough, the bishop of Litchfield and Coventry, wrote her about the new king, George I, and of the continuing breach between the king and the prince. Acknowledging that Lady Russell was kept informed of the “most important” matters by well-placed people, he commended the public welfare to her prayers. Five months later, in
December, in one of Rachel’s few surviving letters about public matters from these years, Lady Russell wrote Galway of her grief over the divisions at court. Finally, in 1720 the duchess of Chandos noted with pleasure Rachel’s support for a project in which her husband had an interest. That the opinion of an eighty-three-year-old person should make any difference at all implies that high regard in which that person is held.

Business affairs still claimed Lady Russell’s attention. From 1720 to 1723 she signed fifteen leaseholds and/or copyholds for her Hampshire estate, three of them dated August 1723. Moreover, she lost no time after Galway’s death in laying claim to the property in France that he had willed her. In 1720 Rachel petitioned King George I for help. She laid before him the details of her claim, declared that she intended to start legal proceedings in France, and asked him to order the English ambassador to “espouse” her interests. George I responded with a letter dated December 1, 1720, to the duc d’Orleans in which he introduced Rachel and asked for protection for her. There is no evidence that Rachel journeyed to France to pursue the matter; a Mr. Robertson apparently represented her interests. Rachel’s claim rested upon Galway’s will, her French lineage (which made her Galway’s next of kin), and her naturalization papers, dated 1641 and confirmed in 1721, which made her a naturalized French citizen with a dispensation from living in France. She confronted counterclaims from her distant French relatives, including the relatives of Marie Tallemant, Rachel’s uncle’s wife, and from others who declared that Louis XIV had given them her cousin’s property when he entered the service of William of Orange. At her death the complicated legal case was still moving through four different French courts, and in 1739 her descendants were still engaged in the litigation. Lady Russell’s energy, initiative, and interest in enlarging her estate in all possible ways are admirably displayed in this last major business venture that she undertook.

Lady Russell had prepared her affairs carefully in anticipation of death, adding two codicils to her will. One in 1718 dealt with further legacies to her servants. Thus, the two men and one woman who had nursed her son in his fatal illness received a sum of money. Rachel also decreed that her housekeeper, Frances Cooke, and other servants were to have the contents of the rooms they occupied as well as a portion of her silver plate. She also provided in this codicil for her cousin Green, mentioned above. Finally, her steward was well rewarded with money (£1,000), furniture, horses, and a lease on property in Bloomsbury Square. Another codicil was added to her will in 1720 simply to provide a legacy for Lucy Sellwood, who had become her housekeeper at the death of Cooke. Rachel also left instructions that she be buried at
Chenies next to her husband and that the funeral be carried out “without escutcheons or funeral pomp further than decency may require.”

Sometime in the third week in September 1723 while at Southampton House, Lady Russell apparently suffered a stroke. Her health must have declined precipitously in early September, for beginning at that time “sitters up” or “watchers” were employed. Her old friend Dr. Hans Sloane and “Mr. Brown,” a surgeon, attended her in this last illness. On September 26, 1723, her granddaughter, Lady Rachel Morgan, wrote from Chatsworth to her brother, who was touring Europe, that the “bad account we have received of Grandmamma Russell has put us into great disorder and hurry.” Their mother had left immediately for London, hoping to reach Lady Russell before death claimed her. It would be a satisfaction to both of them, Lady Morgan felt, for she had heard that her grandmother had asked for her mother. But the duchess of Devonshire was too late. Four servants, including Lucy Sellwood, were with Rachel during her last hours, and one Mrs. Morrell sat up with her through the night. Lady Russell died at five o’clock in the morning on Sunday, September 29, 1723, Michaelmas day. As she wished, Lady Russell was buried at Chenies, probably on October 8. The funeral arrangements cost £154, with the obligatory mourning livery for approximately thirty servants an added £194, sums that suggest that the funeral was conducted without pomp, as she had requested. It may be presumed that her daughter, daughter-in-law, and all of her grandchildren who were in the country attended the funeral services, as well as her servants and the few remaining people whose lives she had touched over her long life. It is only a guess that the service was held in the chapel at Southampton House.

Lady Russell died a wealthy woman, thanks to her skill in managing the property that she had inherited from her father. A different result was, of course, possible, and she deserves credit for shrewd and prudent oversight of her affairs. Her landed properties had substantially increased in value, with the Bloomsbury rentals bringing in close to £3,000 per year and the Hampshire rentals worth also about £3,000 per year. Those sums represented an increase in value of about one-third for the Bloomsbury properties and of about two-thirds for the Hampshire estate. Moreover, Rachel left a personal estate of about £24,000, which included South Sea Stock and annuities, perhaps her only unsound investment. It also included charges of £250 a year due from her grandson for the use of goods and furniture at Southampton House, a sum showing the continued practice of the Russell family to charge relatives who visited them. Although Rachel was not unique among aristocratic women who took an interest in business affairs and estate management, she is not usually named among them; she should be.
Lady Russell also left quantities of household goods and silver plate. The former provided legacies for her servants with the remainder being sold. The bulk of the silver went to her daughter and to the duke of Rutland, who sold his share. The diamond pendants—the gift of the earl of Devonshire in 1688, it will be recalled—are not mentioned, nor is any other jewelry. Also curiously missing from the inventory is a reference to books; only her “papers” are mentioned as being sent to Chatsworth. Yet, it is clear that she had a library of religious works which she read regularly. Probably she disposed of her jewels and books prior to her death.

Lady Russell’s death excited little public notice. She had outlived the many family members and friends who had known and admired her as Russell’s wife and widow, as loving mother, and as a woman of deep piety and sharp political sense. Neither Wriothesley nor Katherine, Bedford nor Devonshire, Galway nor Rutland, Burnet nor Fitzwilliam, were alive to mourn her passing and provide testimonials. Accordingly, only brief notices appeared in the Weekly Journal, or British Gazetteer on October 5, 1723, and in the London Journal on October 12, 1723. The former also carried a poem in her honor, calling her a “relict worthy” of him who “fell a martyr to his holy faith” and commended her for not remarrying but remaining devoted to her husband’s memory, as he had remained unshaken in commitment to political and religious principles. This poem is the only surviving comment that linked Rachel, even indirectly, to public affairs, and it did so by commending her for remaining a widow in honor of her martyred husband. No mention was made that she too had adhered for forty years to the political and religious principles that had earlier animated her and her husband. No reference appeared to evoke memory of her role as William’s political “eyes” and confidante, her unprecedented presence at her husband’s trial, her leading part in the deliberate creation of Russell as a “martyr,” her role in the Glorious Revolution, and her position for many years as a Whig matriarch who exercised some influence in the patronage system of both church and state. Such roles well illustrate the limits of what a well-placed, well-regarded, intelligent aristocratic woman might achieve in public matters.

Rachel’s only surviving daughter, the duchess of Devonshire, did not express deep distress at her mother’s death. Writing to her son James, who with his brother Charles was touring the Continent, the duchess confirmed that her “good mother” had died and added, “‘Tis always hard to part from our friends, but her great age made me expect it, and after a life so well spent, ’tis surely for her a most happy change.” She counselled him and his brother to go into mourning and left it up to him whether his servants should adopt mourning livery. In February
1724, she wrote again about observing the customary marks of mourning and advised him to follow the custom of the country he was in, but cautioned him not to spend too much money on it.\textsuperscript{101} The duchess recognized that her mother was set apart by her goodness and her well-spent life, but she did not take steps to preserve her memory in any special way. There is no evidence, for example, that she read her mother’s religious essays nor that Rachel’s most carefully written “Instructions for Children” found its way into the hands of her grandchildren. It was not, apparently, until 1815 that anyone noticed the essays. It was then that Mary Berry, in the course of preparing for publication Rachel’s personal letters to her husband, came across the essays and deemed them worthy of comment in the biographical sketch of Lady Russell that she wrote. Rachel has not been counted among seventeenth-century women who wrote essays and treatises on religious subjects, but she deserves a place among them.

Lady Russell’s personal letters, thanks to Mary Berry, appeared in print in 1819, just about a hundred years after her death. Love letters to her husband, written during the years of deep marital fulfillment and happiness, they met with approval throughout the nineteenth century, as repeated editions prove. Today they give historians rare insight into aristocratic home life and the interpersonal relationships of wife and husband, parents and children, sister and sister, and other members of an extended family network, and friends, both male and female. Open sensuality, warm friendships, and indulgent, loving parenting characterize those relationships. The extent to which they represent the norm in late-seventeenth-century English life remains to be established.

It was left to Lady Russell’s steward Sellwood to go through the “trunks” of Rachel’s papers that were sent to Chatsworth from Stratton. Among those papers he found the letters that Rachel, as a grieving widow seeking solace and the comfort of religion, had written to Dr. Fitzwilliam. These Fitzwilliam had returned to Rachel in hopes that they would be printed for the “benefit of the public.”\textsuperscript{102} Also in the trunks were the letters Rachel had written to Galway, preserved by him as testimony to his affection and respect, and correspondence between Rachel and Burnet and Tillotson, which they too had kept. Twenty-five years later, in 1748, it was Sellwood who urged John, duke of Bedford, to publish the letters as a tribute to Rachel herself, a woman whose character Sellwood described as “great.” For unknown reasons, nothing came of Sellwood’s project then. But his ordering of her letters made it possible at short notice to put them in the service of her husband’s reputation. Thus, in the absence of Russell’s papers, Rachel’s letters were printed in 1773 as a way of rebutting the damaging revelations of Dalrymple. That Rachel’s letters played a part in rehabilitating the name
of her adored husband would have pleased her. It was, after all, an unusual role for a woman’s letters to play.

In the meantime, in 1723, Sellwood composed a carefully thought-out encomium in the form of a long poem. He praised Rachel’s “arts,” “wisdom,” and “brighter genius,” noted her courage in public affairs, and stressed how well in both trouble and prosperity “her great soul acted.” He remembered her for acts of “piety and charity, love, honour, friendship, [and] hospitality.”103 The tribute came close to evoking Rachel’s strong, lively personality and to noticing the themes that had defined her long life—passion, politics, piety, and property. In working closely with her for twelve years Sellwood had perceived the richness of her character and personality. He, more than anyone else at the time of her death, would surely have concurred with Burnet’s judgment that she was, indeed, “one of the best of women.”